

LITERARY VOICES

A Peer Reviewed Annual Journal of Languages

ISSN : 2277-9949 Vol. 6, 2017



:: Editors ::

Dr. Vandana Dixit

Dr. Sujata Chakravorty

TABLE OF CONTENTS

English Section

S.No.	Paper and Name of Author	P.No.
1]	Thrity Umrigar – <i>Joyous Abandon</i> - <i>Mrs Shanoor K Mirza</i>	185
2]	Emerging Trends In English Language Teaching - <i>Dr. Archana Bobade/Shelke</i>	197
3]	Reading Comprehension: Concepts And Factors Affecting Language Competence To L2/L3 Learners - <i>Sudesh M. B. Bhowate</i>	208
4]	Evolution Of Woman In The Plays Of Harold Pinter - <i>Dr. Manish R. Chakravarty</i>	221
5]	Journey Beyond The Senses In Anita Desai's <i>Journey To Ithaca</i> - <i>Dr. Deepti Jain Thakre</i>	234
6]	Gender Equation In Wilkie Collins' <i>'The Woman In White'</i> - <i>Dr Pranjali Kane</i>	246
7]	The Tragedy Of Rustam And Sohraab - <i>Mrs Kashmiri M Mavalwala</i>	252
8]	Various Themes In J. M. Coetzee's <i>Disgrace</i> - <i>Nitin J. Ghamandi</i>	262
✓ 9]	<u>Art Of Characterization In The Stories Of O. Henry</u> - <i>Narendra L. Gadge</i>	✓267

ART OF CHARACTERIZATION IN THE STORIES OF O. HENRY

- *Narendra L. Gadge*

Abstract

The present paper titled as Art of Characterization in the Stories of O. Henry chiefly focuses on the art of characterization and it specially focuses on O. Henry's brilliant skill presenting an ordinary character in an extra-ordinary manner. The protagonists in his stories are either poor or middle classes people. His stories are having the setting of New York City for he lived and died there. His unique style of surprising people at the very end of the story liked very much by the American poor and middle classes people of America in general and of New York in particular. Like R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand who wrote about the poor people in India; likewise O. Henry also wrote about the sorrows and sufferings of the poor and ordinary people.

Keywords : Characterization, Ordinary, Protagonists, Unique, Surprising, People, Sorrows, Sufferings,

Introduction:

Whenever we pronounce the term the short story we do remember the name of O. Henry. His original name was William Sydney Porter. He was born in a middle class family. In the history of the short story as a literary form, O. Henry occupies a major place. O. Henry is a major presence not only in the history of the

- Assistant Professor, Department of English, Smt. Rajkamal Baburao Tidke Mahavidyalaya, Mouda.

American short story, but in general the history of the short story as a literary form itself. O. Henry whose name was William Sidney Porter was born on September 11, 1862. His father Dr. Algernon Sidney Porter was a practicing physician of Guilford County. O. Henry's mother, Mary Jane Virginia Swaim, was known for her wit and biographers of O. Henry have said that "she passed on her son will, a gift for repartee as well as an artistic temperament and a certain instinctive shyness". (Alphonso Smith, 25.)

O. Henry had to face many troubles particularly financial problems. Helplessly he had to depend upon the generosity of his father-in-law. Even in these fluctuations of life O. Henry never ignored to his literary career. A number of stories which later on turned out to be his masterpieces were written during this period when he was working for this weekly **The Houston Post**. **This was his temporary relief. Later he had to go to jail for the embezzlement in the bank.** The period of five years was reduced to three years on account of his good behavior. O. Henry's prison years form a very important part of his life. Because it was during this period that he turned his adversity into full-fledged creativity and started emerging as a professional writer. **As Longford says, "O. Henry was literally born during Porter's three years stay in prison."** (Langford Gerald 149)

By the end of 1902 he had published more than 25 stories many of which were published in **The Sunday World** a leading newspaper with a circulation of nearly half a million. O. Henry now had both fortune and fame. He wrote about **New York life** with its typical places and people comprising shop girls, show girls and prostitutes. The foregoing account of O. Henry's personal

life shows how his creative talent as a short story writer is deeply embedded into it. His early childhood and early experiences, his struggle for livelihood in his youth involving a picaresque movement from place to place in search of jobs, his three year exposure to prison life, and the fame and the fortune he acquired in the last phase, all these indicate a complex graph of life of a writer whose self seems to be in a perpetual process of making.

Meaning of Characterization:

O. Henry wrote the short stories around his characters. In his plots it is the central character or characters play a vital role. Both O. Henry has given equal importance to his characters as well as situation or plot. He has a unique skill of characterization. First of all we will see in short what is characterization? And what is its art. And how does an expert writer get the mastery over it. There are many short story writers who are known for their art of characterization. These short story writers are Edgar Allen Poe, Guy De Muapassant, Ernest Hemingway, R. K. Narayan, Rabindranath Tagore, Ruskin Bond, Henry James and Rudyard Kipling and many more.

Characterization as a literary tool was coined in the mid-15th century. Aristotle in his Poetics argued that "tragedy is a representation, not of men, but of action and life." Thus the assertion of unmistakable. This point of view was later abandoned by many because, in the 19th century, the dominance of character over plot became clear through petty bourgeois plays, novels, and stories. The dominance of plot over characters, termed "plot-driven narrative," is unmistakable. This point of view was later abandoned by many because, in the 19th century, the

dominance of character over plot became clear through petty bourgeois plays, novels, and stories.

Kinds of Characters:

Characters are revealed to the readers in various ways. Such as description, dialogue, thoughts, and feelings, actions and reactions, imagery and symbols. . Frankly speaking there are five major types. There might be more types but as far as short stories are concerned following types of characters are significant:

i). **Flat character**; it does not essentially change throughout the story. ii) **Round character**; it has something of the complexity, we find in real human beings. He or she changes in some important way as the novel or story unfolds itself and stands out. iii) **Dynamic character**; it changes significantly during the course of the story; generally protagonist is always nearly a dynamic character. iv) **Static character**; it does not undergo significant change. v) **Stereotype or stock character**; these characters are often the basis of flat character.

O. Henry's Art of Characterization:

In the works of O. Henry, the technique of characterization is one of the principal features contributing to the phenomenally meteoric rise to success of this "master of the short-story". The principal characters of all of O. Henry's stories, with but few exceptions are people of low, or the very lowest state of society. One New York writer remarked that there were only "four hundred" people worth writing about in the city of New York. This phase of short story development was something comparatively new at the time O. Henry was writing (1900-1910).

The shop-girls, poor clerks, hoboos, immigrants, and Negroes are treated with a profound depth of sympathy and understanding.

O. Henry's canvas was broad. His characters include representations of people whom he had met during his early life spent in North Carolina and later in Texas, Louisiana, Central America, and finally New York City. *The Four Million*, *Voice of the City*, *The Trimmed Lamp*, *Strictly Business*, *Heart of the West*, *Rolling Stones*, and a few additional stories from other volumes reflect the influence of the author's Western experiences.

The *Gentle Grafter* volume contains stories told to O. Henry while he was in prison; the background of these stories is very broad indeed covering sections of Texas, Louisiana, Carolina and the city of New York. *Roads of Destiny* shows the influence of the author's extensive. This is a miscellaneous collection as are the volumes titled *Options*, *Sixes and Sevens*, and *Whirligigs*.

All of his characters are types. He makes romantic figures of them in his character portrayals, but in each case, the traits which identify a type predominate, and any individuality present is always only a peculiarity in an O. Henry character. The shop-girls, cowboys, clerks, and the starving artist, all dress, act and speak as would be expected of them, ordinarily.

Even in the usual O. Henry-last-line denouement, where the cow-boy may prove to be a "female who marries the hero" who is not the one-you thought. The characters are often built up to represent one type; then a surprise-reversal at the very end only serves to emphasize the lack of individuality, because there is no further character delineation from that point. They are

romantic character-portrayals. The humor, whimsicality, pathos, and occasional tinge of bitterness exhibited are really life only as the author and most often, the reader would have it to be. O. Henry did not probe into the deeper emotions, for that would require a more serious treatment; consequently, any true reality in characterization is sacrificed. There is not a single bad woman in all his stories.

O. Henry's distinction that he has enlarged the area of the American short story by enriching and diversifying its social themes. In his hands the short story has become the organ of a social consciousness more varied and multifarious than it had ever expressed before. **Old Sir John Davies** once said of the soul that it was: "Much likes a subtle spider which doth sit in the middle of her web, which spread & wide; it ought to touch the utmost thread of it, she feels it constantly One very side" (**Alphonso C. Smith 112**)

O. Henry wrote short stories on thieves, orphans, women prisoners, colored people, poor and robbers etc. He keenly observed and portrayed them by his style of writing. He was closely associated with the middle class and lower class people, his themes and techniques are concerned with the nuances of the vast majority of Americans. His plots are filled with keen observation and the hearts and minds of common people. He has deep insight and understanding of human beings. He is sympathetic and compassionate towards fellow sufferers. O. Henry is a serious writer with ulterior motive of changing and improving human life. He scorns at the mistakes, wrong doings

and various other maladies of social life. He deals with common themes of loneliness, love, guilt, sacrifice.

He had seen a number of social problems. These problems and scenes as they were observed by him had no solution them in his own way; his popular themes were very popular among the Americans, because they were about middle class or lower classes of people. As we know that O. Henry had no steady life. He was a motherless boy; he was lonely as well as very sensitive. Even his schooling was rudimentary. He was working in a drug house. Then he went to prison where he met some thieves and smugglers. All these incidents gave him enough experience to write about the thieves and smuggler and burglars.

The artist must know life and reflect it as best he may through the peculiarly tinged lens of his temperament. Within a certain area of middle-class life, O. Henry was on familiar terms with many types of humanity. This area is bounded on the West by his cowboys and ranches, on the East by his shop-girls and Bagdad-by-the-Subway, on the South by his colonels and the domain of the Gentle Grafter. He kept close to the scenes and lives with which he had firsthand acquaintance. His work, therefore, has continuity as his own life had it. **Stephen Leacock** has reminded us, "It is an error of the grossest kind to say that O. Henry's work is not sustained. In reality his canvas is vast. His New York stories, like those of Central America or of the West, form one great picture as gloriously comprehensive in its scope as the lengthiest novel of a Dickens or the canvas of a DaVinci." (**Blanche Colton Williams 202,203**)

Poor and Middle classes characters in O. Henry's Stories:

O. Henry has a soft-corner for the poor; here are a few stories illustrated in that vein. As in "The Halberdier of the Little Rheinchloss" it is from his collection 'Roads of Destiny.' He juxtaposes a poor waiter, who was made to stand like a statue at the entrance of the hotel and an arrogant, rich girl who wanted Sir Percival, the waiter, to serve her. The girl realizes her mistake; the old man pointed out that the insolent, pampered aristocrats did anything they liked because of money. In the story, the poor; helped the poor; the rich realized only much later in their lifetime. The poor are associated with the life of the author. He had a sympathetic heart, especially for the hard working poor. Just watch poverty and his helplessness from the following passage of the story:

'From 8 P.M. to two in the morning was the Halberdier's hours. He got two meals with us help and a dollar a night. I eat with him at the table. He liked me. He never told his name. He was traveling impromptu, like kings, I guess. The first time at supper I says to him, 'Have some more of the spuds, Mr. Frelinghuysen.' 'Oh, don't be so formal, and offish, Eighteen, says he. 'Call me Hal that's short for halberdier. 'Oh, don't think I wanted to pry for names, says I. 'I know all about the dizzy fall from wealth and greatness. We've got a count washing dishes in the kitchen; and the third bartender used to be a Pullman conductor. And they work, Sir Percival, says I, sarcastic.' (Harry Hansen 531)

In the story, "An Unfinished Story" which is taken from The Four Collection O. Henry focuses on the life of Dulcie, a shop girl, and on the way shop girls in general must live on their

small salaries. Our introduction to **Dulcie** is abrupt, and at first, we really don't know why we are hearing about her. It turns out, however, that the bulk of the story concerns her. The most important detail about Dulcie is that she is a shop girl who lives on six dollars a week. Granted, at the beginning of the 20th century, when this story was written, six dollars would have gone much further than it would today. In fact, O. Henry spells out exactly how she gets by on this amount of money:

“For the room, Dulcie paid two dollars per week. On week-days her breakfast cost ten cents; she made coffee and cooked an egg over the gaslight while she was dressing...” We get the impression that Dulcie must live in a modest style. As we get to know her, we can see that she is disciplined and that her life does not offer much in the way of happiness or excitement. O. Henry exactly describes Dulcie's condition in his own words:

‘Dulcie worked in a department store. She sold Hamburg edging, or stuffed peppers, or automobiles, or other little trinkets such as they keep in department stores. Of what she earned, Dulcie received six dollars per week. The remainder was credited to her and debited to somebody else's account in the ledger kept by G—Oh, primal energy, you say, Reverend Doctor— Well, then, in the Ledger of Primal Energy.’ (**Harry Hansen 72**)

In “**A Retrieved Reformation**”, we have the protagonist whose name is Jimmy Valentine. He is also famous for breaking bank lockers. There is no expert in that work as Jimmy is. After releasing from jail he goes to remote town and settled there with his loving fiancé. He does not tell his background to her. He wants to leave and forget his ill background and wants to live a

pure character life. In one incident he is caught in tight corner. He is about to marry the daughter of the president of the bank. In the new time vault the president's little niece is shut accidentally. Jimmy cut his way into the vault with the burglar kit, saves her and walks clearly out to the spot where a detective is waiting for him. The detective denies of recognizing Jimmy and let him go. Although he is a thief, he is person of pure character. He is humane human. This incident O. Henry describes so beautifully in order to bring the rare qualities in the character of Jimmy Valentine. Thus without caring of his arrest by the lawman he shows his master skill and saves the child. Eventually the character of the lawman has been shown as a pure one. Thus Jimmy remains a person of pure character before his beloved. Thus O. Henry portrays a criminal who has not lost his humane attitude despite his criminal life. Along with the author, the reader also sympathizes with the undergoing Jimmy Valentine.

Conclusion:

Whereas O. Henry was born in the middle class family and he spent most of his lifetime in New York City, he saw the life of poor and middle classes people very closely. This observation flamed sympathy in his sensitive heart. Every ordinary person whether it is a thief, burglar, a bar girl and even a prostitute prompted him to write about them. When his stories came out in the book form; people embraced them for those stories were very close to him. Moreover O. Henry's art of characterization and his unique style of giving surprising and unexpected jolt at the end of the story, liked very much by the people. The characters of O. Henry belong to urban area. They face the same problems whether it is the domestic problem or the problems of money.

They themselves create problems, and they solve their problems. O. Henry ever try to finish their stories with optimistic note. O. Henry tried to show that where there is a will there is a way. The characters in the stories of O. Henry know that pain, sorrows and sufferings are the integral part of the life and they accept it.

Undoubtedly O. Henry is the voice of the common and poor people. If Shakespeare writes about kings and princess and become great. Then for us O. Henry is also greater than Shakespeare for he has voice to the poor and middle classes characters. That's why he is regarded as the greatest short story writer. In the words of **Elmer Kelton**, "O. Henry is a staunch advocate of the cause of the underprivileged, obviously ranked insignificantly in society, is evidently exemplified with his reference to the hall porter, the janitor, the elevator man, the messenger boys, the waiters, the milkman, the guard, the cook and the maid in his story, 'A Sacrifice Hit', thus O. Henry gradually becomes a writer of the common people, "always sympathetic to the common man" (**Elmer Kelton**)

Works Cited

1. Charles Alphonso Smith, *O. Henry Biography*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1916)
2. Elmer Kelton, *Letters to Lithopolis From O. Henry to Mabel Wagnalls*, 2nd Edition, published by Eakin Press, Texas, Nov, 1999.
3. Gerald Langford, *Alias O. Henry: A Biography of William Sidney Porter*, (New York : The Macmillan Company, 1957)
3. Harry Hansen, *The Complete Works of O. Henry*, Doubleday & Company, Inc. Garden City, New York, 1899
4. Williams Blanche Colton, *Modern American Writers, Our Short Story Writers*, Moffat Yard & Company, New York, 1920